



Wartime Sourcing

Building Capability and Predictability through Continuity

Lieutenant Colonel Heather Reed, U.S. Army

THE U.S. MILITARY has been fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan for over nine years, yet our Army continues to source the fight year-by-year rather than devising a long-term sourcing solution. Although we are supplying these wars with the appropriate number and types of units and personnel, we can do this more efficiently and more effectively by revising our methods. We can also bring a semblance of predictability to our soldiers' lives that will improve the short- and long-term health of the institution.

The method of sourcing I propose is to align requirements (units and individuals) habitually with units or sourcing organizations. Recently, our leadership has proposed a plan termed "Campaign Continuity" that begins to address one weakness in our current sourcing process. However, to improve the process, we need to analyze a number of aspects of sourcing, including tour length, continuity in sourcing, and the balance of sourcing for both units and individual augmentees.

We should determine a way to best balance the health of the service and the welfare of the soldier with mission accomplishment. I propose to do this by reviewing the impacts of tour length, dwell time, reset, and continuity. I will also make recommendations on how to ensure that the entire force has the opportunity to contribute to current and future fights.

Maximum Tour Length vs. Optimal Tour Length

Accepting the current operating environment as a long-term war requires conducting an analysis of tour length for service members. The Army must determine the maximum duration that it expects a soldier or unit to deploy. Our current method of deployment schedules seems to focus on dwell time to determine tour length. In fact, we should do the opposite. Once we determine maximum tour length, we can determine dwell time.

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PHOTO: An instructor with the 75th Security Forces Squadron demonstrates proper buddy care techniques during a combat readiness training course at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, 4 September 2010. (U.S. Air Force, SSgt Renae Saylock)

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Closely examining the psychological impacts of serving in a combat zone is important to determine maximum tour length. Depending on the intensity of the assignment and exposure to combat stress, there is likely a maximum amount of time in a combat zone before service members experience a significant degradation in capability. The mental health advisory teams sent to Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom have conducted investigations and provided insight and recommendations to improve force health. In November 2006, Mental Health Advisory Team IV's central findings included the following observations: "Overall, Soldiers had higher rates of mental health problems than Marines," and "Deployment length was related to higher rates of mental health problems and marital problems."¹ Key recommendations included extending the interval between deployments and decreasing deployment length.² The Army has only focused on the first recommendation.

Our current policy is that all units deploy for 12 months (including mobilization for reserve units). Based on the above findings and having served both a 12-month and a 15-month deployment, I propose that 12 months should be the maximum tour length, the longest time we expect a soldier to operate in a combat zone.

The next thing we need to determine is optimal tour length—the tour length that best balances the requirements of the mission and the health of the soldier. Based on Mental Health Advisory Team IV findings, six to nine months is a better range

to ensure mental health and optimal performance for most soldiers. In 2008, the surgeon generals of the Army, Navy, and Air Force told senators that "the optimal tour in Afghanistan and Iraq to reduce combat stress should be 6 to 9 months with 18 months at home."³ Although the 18-month is not yet achievable, the 6- to 9-month tour length is possible in the current operating environment if we implement a better plan for continuity. While I propose 6 to 9 months for most units, we should determine appropriate tour lengths not by blanket policy but by mission and unit type. We should examine mission requirements, reset time, and the psychological impact of time deployed in a combat zone. These factors should drive tour length, which should then determine dwell time, rather than letting dwell time govern tour length. This means that units or soldiers with shorter tours will deploy more often. We should base optimal tour length on mission requirements and reset requirements, balanced with the understanding that shorter tour lengths are better for mental health.

In determining optimal tour length, we should look at each type of mission based on two factors: frequency and level of interaction with the local populace, and similarity of the unit's deployed mission to their doctrinal mission.

In a counterinsurgency, missions that require interaction with the local populace and relationship-building may require longer tour lengths or repeated deployments to the same location to facilitate the necessary interpersonal relations between soldiers and key leaders in local governance, tribal, and



Chief of Staff of the Army GEN George W. Casey, Jr., talks with unit commanders who will lead forces in Afghanistan, Fort Drum, NY, 30 July 2010.

U.S. Army, D. Myes Cullen

security elements. The length and intensity of train-up requirements for deployed missions also merits consideration. For example, a helicopter mechanic performs the same job whether located at an airfield in Bagram, Afghanistan, or at a U.S. base, but a provincial reconstruction team (PRT) member is part of an ad hoc organization from three different services and performs missions unique to deployed operations. Such missions require greater train-up and more time in theater to realize the benefits of the training. These factors may point to a longer optimal tour length. Division and higher headquarters may require a longer tour length to accomplish strategic goals and support the rotation of subordinate units.

Unit Continuity

Reset and team building are unique aspects of sourcing units. Reset will have an effect on tour length in some cases, both in terms of personnel and equipment. For example, upgrades to existing platforms have proven to significantly impact aviation units.

Two factors can limit the impact of equipment reset in determining dwell time and tour length. First, we must maximize the use of theater-provided equipment in Iraq and Afghanistan, performing upgrades and resets in theater or within the Central Command area of responsibility whenever possible. (The Army is already working to improve this process for Afghanistan, and should give it full emphasis in both conflict regions). This effort will also significantly lower the impact of deploying and redeploying forces on the limited transportation assets available. Second, we need to look at adjusting the reset model as we adjust our tour lengths, and reset equipment based on need rather than timeline.

Long dwell times have an upside but also pose a significant disadvantage in terms of continuity: a long dwell time allows for significant unit personnel turnover, particularly within low-density military occupational specialties. This high-turnover rate also requires a more intense train-up period to integrate new personnel. By comparison, a shorter tour length and corresponding dwell time incurs less personnel turnover and, by extension, greater continuity, allowing units to focus on refreshing atrophied skills. We can reduce the train-up

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requirement by increasing the frequency with which units return to the same deployed areas of operations. Although this will not lengthen dwell time, it will improve the quality of this time because units will not require the intense field training currently needed to prepare them for deployment. In other words, less turnover means the unit needs less training to deploy, and dwell time really can mean spending time with families rather than months in the field and at combat training centers.

Individuals returning to the same location provide a benefit to their unit and the host nation government they support. They are able to build on existing relationships and cultural understanding as well as maintain continuity of effort within their areas of operation. Moreover, a unit returning to the same location (with sufficient continuity in the organization) produces an even better effect in maintaining continuity of operations. Often, new units arrive in theater and make quick adjustments in operations to realize their impact within the length of the unit's tour. Sometimes the leaders of the new unit make the changes before they fully understand all the implications of their actions. If units return to a location where they have previously served and they retain some of their leaders, they have the knowledge necessary to anticipate the second- and third-order effects of their actions and are less likely to derail efforts of a previous unit.

After determining optimal tour length and requisite unit dwell time based on operational requirements and reset ability, we will most likely have the force structure to align two to three units per force requirement—more as we withdraw from Iraq. One option for sourcing is to employ two Active Component (AC) units and one Reserve Component (RC) unit in rotation for each requirement. Each of the AC units will have two deployments and one long and one short dwell period during a rotation, and the RC unit will

deploy once during this cycle with a longer dwell time between rotations (e.g., AC1—AC2—AC1—AC2—RC, repeat). An example of this alignment could be assigning responsibility for an area in Afghanistan to 2nd and 3rd Brigade Combat Teams from the 10th Mountain Division (Fort Drum, New York) and 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (New York Army National Guard). By assigning this responsibility as semi-permanent, these three organizations can improve home station train-up by incorporating lessons from the recently redeployed unit into the training of the about-to-deploy unit. Moreover, we can increase the effect of lessons learned by exchanging leaders to serve as observer/controllers during unit field training and training center rotations.

By using a 9-month deployment cycle and 30-day (or less) reception, staging, onward-movement, and integration model, units will have one long dwell period and one short dwell period in a cycle. During the short dwell period, the unit will experience limited turnover, conduct refresher training, and coordinate with the unit currently in theater to prepare for deployment. During the longer dwell period, the unit will have greater turnover, requiring a more extensive train-up and a training center rotation. Their equipment will be reset as required. The RC unit will maintain a constant dwell between deployments, but will maintain a partnership with the other two units in order to train and prepare for deployment and ensure a shorter mobilization period.

Returning people and units to the same locations warrants not only deploying individual units to the same places. It may also merit maximizing individual reassignments to units that deploy to and from the same areas. Many soldiers point out that sending a “guidon” to the same location doesn’t mean that the unit has the same people. A soldier who serves in a brigade combat team in Afghanistan for one tour may move to another unit

on the same installation for his or her second tour. We can capitalize on this by aligning entire posts with Afghanistan or other theaters of operation (e.g., Fort Bragg and Fort Campbell might be “Afghanistan posts,” with soldiers moving among units on these posts or “Regional Command-East posts”). This helps retain firsthand knowledge of areas of operation and fosters working relationships among similarly aligned brigades and division headquarters. Although a modular army means that units can work for any headquarters or have any subordinate units, there is value added in habitual working relationships where possible. In addition, as we draw down in Iraq, we can either include off-ramped units in rotations to Afghanistan (using four or more units to increase dwell time) or have them regain proficiency in the skills needed for a more conventional fight to better balance all global requirements.

Finally, we need to examine additional sourcing methods to ensure that the entire service contributes its expertise to the fight. If there is an inequity in the deployment burden among units, military specialties, or ranks, we should address it with greater emphasis. Such inequities, whether perceived or actual, affect morale, and efforts to eliminate them are not wasted.

In sourcing the war, the primary focus remains on large units, such as brigades and deployable higher headquarters. However, the availability of brigades is rarely our Achilles’ heel: the differential between the high demand and low supply of specialty skilled enablers is the real concern. While the military needs to maintain certain organizations for a conventional war, these units should not be on the sidelines awaiting such a contingency. Individuals often have a functional area or a secondary specialty. Certain operational units should be no different. Directing such secondary missions early would allow these units to allocate equipment, conduct training for these secondary missions, and

Many soldiers point out that sending a “guidon” to the same location doesn’t mean that the unit has the same people...



U.S. Army photo, John Crosby

A soldier says his goodbyes during a departure ceremony at Camp Atterbury Joint Maneuver Training Center, Indiana, 25 September 2010.

augment the force structure for counterinsurgency-specific missions. For example, counter-improvised explosion device exploitation and fixed-site and convoy security operations that would normally fall to military police units, already in short supply, could be formally specified as secondary missions to other units. To facilitate this additional mission set, the Army should look at two options.

The first is developing augmentation tables of distribution and allowances similar to those we use to support brigade combat teams with an advisory mission. The Army G3 has developed such tables for additional soldiers to augment brigade combat teams serving as advise and assist brigades in Iraq and security force assistance brigades in Afghanistan. When a unit has been assigned this mission, the requisite augmentation paragraph is “turned on,” authorizing additional soldiers for the unit. The same could be done for other units performing nonstandard missions.

The second option is adjusting manning requirements based on a unit’s nonstandard mission. For example, there are many ad hoc requirements in theater that do not closely match an existing

Army organization. Most of these requirements are for officers and NCOs, so we source them as individuals rather than as units. Instead, we should assign a unit to the mission that is a “best fit” and provide guidance to Human Resources Command on its level of fill. This will allow the organization to train as a team before it deploys without leaving soldiers at home or bringing more downrange than it needs for the mission.

Finally, we need to consider “talent-to-task,” or picking the right person for the right job. The Army can extend this to assigning the right unit for the right job, particularly the National Guard. Although our Reserve Component units are capable of performing the same conventional missions as the Active Component, in this fight they bring much more to the table if we leverage their skills. We need to transition from using Reserve Component units to fulfill conventional missions and instead take advantage of the other unique skills and knowledge that these soldiers and airmen gain from their civilian jobs.

Consider the example of provincial reconstruction teams. In Afghanistan and Iraq, we employ ad

hoc PRTs, comprised of Active and Reserve Component soldiers, sailors, and airmen who form as teams three months before deployment and deploy for nine months at a time. An improved model is applied for agribusiness development teams, currently employed in Afghanistan, where the members for each team are unilaterally sourced by one state National Guard command, with the intent of forming a partnership between the state and the advised Afghan province. Although this is a fledgling concept, habitual state partnerships are promising.

The next step in this evolution is to establish a state partnership with each province in Regional Command-East, and eventually Regional Command-South. The state National Guard would provide teams whose mission combines that of the PRT and agribusiness development teams. State leaders (both political and National Guard) would develop a relationship with the Afghan provincial government to better determine support requirements. Ideally, sourcing would involve a National Guard unit augmented with civilians to provide technical skills. States would

link with provinces based on similar agriculture, natural resources, and economic capabilities, and the state would update requirements based on the province's needs. The National Guard would provide the required security force and administrative support from the sourced unit, and the state would provide agricultural advisors and the reach-back capability to state agricultural colleges. Advisors could be volunteer instructors on sabbatical, civilian contractors, or come from the Department of State's Civilian Reserve Corps.

Individual Augmentee Continuity

One other way to capitalize on talent is to rethink assignment of individual augmentees to Joint manning document billets, looking at continuity and skill set rather than simply military occupational skill and grade. Currently, the Army uses the Worldwide Individual Augmentee System tasking process to source individual assignments. When General David Petraeus initially built his staff in Iraq and deliberately included a number of military members with doctoral degrees, many



U.S. Army, PFC Donald Watkins

U.S. soldiers with 4th Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, conduct clearing operations in the Baraki Barak district of Logar Province, Afghanistan, 21 December 2010.

touted him as taking a novel approach to staffing a combat headquarters. These individuals were not chosen by their ranks or military occupations, but for their education, background, and individual experiences. *Newsweek* even published an article entitled the “Brainiac Brigade” about the intellectuals he assembled for his staff.⁴ Novel, maybe. Smart, yes. We should take the same approach throughout the Central Command area of responsibility.

First, we need to leverage soldiers from generating force organizations: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command; the U.S. Military Academy; Headquarters, Department of the Army; etc. Second, we need to provide continuity by assigning individual augmentee positions to specific organizations at the lowest level feasible. The Army G8 has filled the force management augmentee slot in Combined Joint Task Force-101 for several years. This cross-fertilizes knowledge among the officers in the G8 and creates working relationships between organizations in theater and in the U.S. We could accomplish the same things in many positions at headquarters in Iraq and Afghanistan by identifying individuals whose duty description in their organization at home is similar to one on a Joint manning document. Service academy faculties are ideal for the higher echelon positions at the operational or strategic level. (We send a large number of senior captains to earn masters degrees and then teach at West Point for three years, which takes them out of the deployment cycle for five years or longer.) Each HQDA staff section with a counterpart in Afghanistan would benefit from rotating individuals into theater to bring back fresh experiences.

By giving an academic department at West Point or a directorate at various headquarters specific ownership of certain Joint manning document positions, we bring unique skill sets to higher-level deployed commands, create reach-back ability, build continuity within the organization that owns that mission, and build credibility as soldiers remain current in Operation New Dawn and Operation Enduring Freedom issues. Many advise and train mission sets in Iraq and Afghanistan align with Army generating force mission sets.

These units organize, train, equip and generate, and employ and sustain the military and police forces of these two countries.⁵ Our generating force commands should own applicable training teams and Joint manning document positions for these corresponding organizations. The same continuity and cross-fertilization will occur as organizations maintain enduring responsibility for the same billets. On a 3-year tour at one of these generating force organizations, one should expect to deploy for approximately 12 months, depending on one’s job or skill set. I specifically use the terms “job” or “skill set” because conventional military occupational specialty descriptions are not always what we look for in today’s COIN fight.

Not only do generating force units bring the right skills to the fight, but commanders, directors, and department heads can internally manage deployment cycles. This adds continuity, predictability, and flexibility. With the reach-back that this provides, shorter tours may be feasible. With the flexibility this provides, we allow soldiers to work together to support the combatant commander while meeting their personal needs. For example, if a soldier has a personal event that he or she wishes to attend (birth of a child, high school graduation, etc.) a coworker may deploy early to allow him or her to return home. Since both individuals work in the same office for the same boss, this is far more feasible.

Relooking the Way We Source Requirements

These recommendations will require changes in our sourcing procedures and new guidance to Human Resources Command in priorities for personnel assignments, but they will improve our overall efforts. We cannot continue to greatly under-source our generating force by turning to it for individual augmentee sourcing.

By relooking the way we source requirements and devising a long-term solution, we can become more effective in performing our military mission and assuring a good measure of the predictability that our soldiers need. We should start this now for those requirements that we consider to be long-term. **MR**

NOTES


1. Office of the Surgeon, Multinational Force-Iraq, and Office of the Surgeon General, U.S. Army Medical Command, "Mental Health Advisory Team IV Final Report," 17 November 2006, 3, <http://www.armymedicine.army.mil/reports/mhat/mhat_iv/MHAT_IV_Report_17NOV06.pdf>.

2. "Mental Health Advisory Team IV Final Report," 5.

3. Bob Brewin, "Top military doctors say six- to nine-month combat tours would reduce stress," GovernmentExecutive.com, 17 April 2008, <<http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0408/041708bb1.htm>> (21 March 2010).

4. Babak Dehghanpisheh and John Berry, "Brainiac Brigade," *Newsweek.com*, 17 September 2007, <<http://www.newsweek.com/id/40756>> (21 March 2010).

5. MNSTC-I Homepage, <http://www.mnstci.iraq.centcom.mil/history_of_mnstci.aspx> (17 December 2010). Site is no longer accessible. See NTM-A/CSTC-A homepage, <<http://ntm-a.com/documents/enduringledger/el-oneyear.pdf>> (24 March 2010).



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